

Art review of
Joseph Nechvatal vOluptuary: an algorithmic hermaphornology
at Universal Concepts Unlimited Gallery
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by Robert C. Morgan
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vOluptuary: an algorithmic hermaphornology partial installation view 2002

Joseph Nechvatal is a digital artist who works with painting. More precisely, he works with acrylic-jet paintings that are based on a dense overlay of imagery that have been programmed for the computer. His recent exhibition of paintings, titled *vOluptuary: an algorithmic hermaphornology*, is composed from erotic sources that suggest an intense palimpsest of libidinal energy. As Nechvatal describes in an accompanying essay, he is concerned with

subverting the limits of gender representation through “the mutable image and performance of pan-sexuality.”

In fact, Nechvatal was one of the first artists to work with computers in relation to painting. As early as 1986, he pursued the notion that the physical act of painting was less important than the imagery that informed the results. By the early nineties, he was spending more time in France than in New York. During these forays, he divided his time between computer research at the Foundation Claude-Nicholas Ledoux and frequent visits to the Louvre where he studied the great paintings of Poussin, David, Ingres, Gericault and Delacroix. He eventually met the late French philosopher Félix Guattari who, along with Gilles Deleuze, had a profound impact on Nechvatal's thinking. This occurred during the time that Nechvatal was starting a doctoral program at the University of Wales, where he produced a thesis largely inspired by Deleuze.

While Nechvatal's cyber-erotic vocabulary may defer the attention of some observers, *vOluptuary: an algorithmic hermaphroditology* is a pleasure to behold. It exceeds the limits of puritanical art -- the kind of predestined art that is so rampant in the marketplace -- and carries us into the future, beyond the vestiges of solipsism and despair. Nechvatal has given us a sequence of pixilated paintings, filled with electronic color, cyber-effects, and a subtle distillation of sexual energy. They are works that provoke thought and emotion on the level of “a chameleon-like sexual demeanor ... built from the virtual abyss.” They propose a quiet delirium -- fraught with orgasmic punctuation -- as sure-fire in their intensity as any painting today that hovers between abstraction and representation.